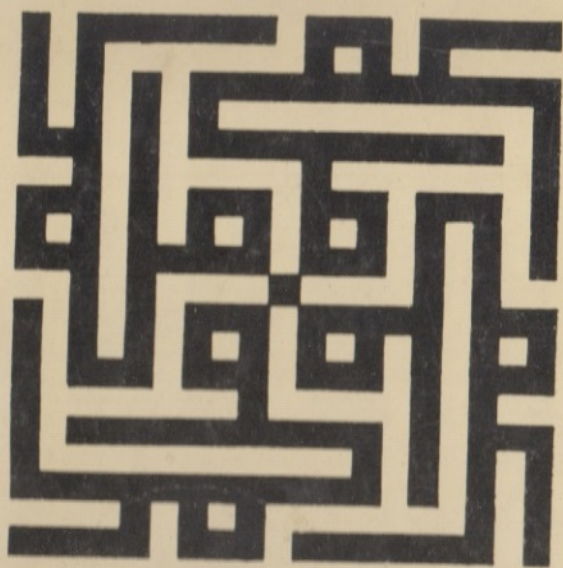


ISLAMIC VIEW  
OF  
MAN



Dr. Ali Shariati

# **Islamic View of Man**

**by**

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*Doctorate of Sociology and Islamic History from  
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**English Translation**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ali Shariati was born in Mazinan, a suburb of Mashad, Iran. He completed his elementary and high school in Mashad. In his years at the Teacher's Training College, he came into contact with youth who were from the lower economic strata of the society and tasted the poverty and hardship that existed.

At the age of eighteen, he started as a teacher and ever since had been a student as well as a teacher. After graduating from college in 1960, on a scholarship he pursued graduate studies in France. Dr. Shariati, an honor student, received his doctorate in sociology in 1964.

When he returned to Iran he was arrested at the border and imprisoned on the pretext that he had participated in political activities while studying in France. Released in 1965, he began teaching again at Mashad University. As a Muslim sociologist, he sought to explain the problems of Muslim societies in the light of Islamic principles - explaining them and discussing them with his students. Very soon, he gained popularity with the students and different social classes in Iran. For this reason, the regime felt obliged to discontinue his courses at the university.

Then he was transferred to Tehran. There, Dr. Shariati continued his very active and brilliant career. His lectures at Houssein-e-Ershad Religious Institute attracted not only six thousand students who registered in his summer classes, but also many thousands of people from different backgrounds who were fascinated by his teachings.

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Dr. Shariati studied and experienced many philosophical, theological and social schools of thought with an Islamic view. One could say that he was a Muslim Muhajir who rose from the depth of the ocean of eastern mysticism, ascended to the heights of the formidable mountains of western social sciences, yet was not overwhelmed, and he returned to our midst with all the jewels of this fantastic voyage.

He was neither a reactionary fanatic who opposed anything that was new without any knowledge nor was he of the so-called westernized intellectuals who imitated the west without independent judgment.

Knowledgeable about the conditions and forces of his time, he began his Islamic revival with enlightenment of the masses, particularly the youth. He believed that if these elements of the society had true faith, they would totally dedicate themselves and become active and Mujahid elements who would give everything - including their lives - for their ideals.

Dr. Shariati constantly fought to create humanitarian values in the young generation, a generation whose values have been defaced with the help of the most scientific and technical methods. He



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Dr. Shariati wrote many books. Some of his works are listed at the end of this book. In all his writings, he tried to present a clear and genuine picture of Islam. He strongly believed that if the intellectual and new generation realized the truth of this faith, attempts toward social change would be successful.

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Since today's civilization has based its faith on "Humanism" which signifies human nobility, this phenomenon is of great importance. The roots of the problem originate in the degradation of man's personality imposed by old faiths and religions. This condition evolved by urging the individual to sacrifice himself for God in order to demonstrate the impotence of his will in comparison to God's. It was also advocated that man's request be made by begging during prayers and other forms of worship. As a result, after the scientific revolution, humanism opposed these "Faiths of Gods" that were based upon "Divine Power and metaphysics". The rationale of humanism, a concept which originated in Athens but became an international faith, is to re-introduce the elements of nobility and genuineness to mankind. The basis of today's western civilization, humanity is a reaction to the faith of Scholastics and Christianity of the Middle Ages.

This article will address itself to the Islamic view of mankind — a very complicated phenomenon. Does it perceive man as a very weak creature whose aim, and philosophy is nothing but to be a failure and disabled before God or Gods? Does Islam respect man's nobility? Does Islam assert the weakness and incapability of man? Or does it advocate the opposite? To believe in the true Islam is to endow man with nobility and respect his values and high qualities, The following is devoted to this topic.

It is best to study various philosophies of creation. This discussion will be limited to Islam and the faiths before it such as those of Moses, Jesus and Abraham. How is the creation of man described in the book of Abraham or Islam which is the complete form of that ideology? Is it possible to discover the rank and values of man from the Quranic description or sayings of the prophet Mohammed (PBUH)? By reviewing the creation of Adam who symbolized mankind in the Quran, one will be exposed to the Islamic concept of creation.

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Firstly, it is necessary to mention that the language of the faiths and prophets (especially the Sami-religions which Muslims believe in) are “symbolic”. Symbolic language relates meaning in a mysterious fashion; however, this has been the best language to date. It is more valuable and eternal in comparison to lay language where meanings lack mystery. The latter approach may be more useful and easier to teach but lacks permanence. Why? As Abdou-Rahman Badavi, a famous contemporary philosopher, maintains — a faith or school that attempts to describe all the facts and meanings in lay language will not survive because the audience is of various types, classes, educational backgrounds, generations, histories, points of view, insight and depths of knowledge. Therefore, the language of a faith should be multi-faceted so that it may apply to each period of time. Otherwise, its essence is limited to only one generation; the following generations will find it meaningless!

All the literary works and traditions which employ symbolic language are still valid for the same reason. Everytime “Hafez”<sup>1</sup> is read — depending on one’s interests, knowledge, and level of thought, something new is learned. On the other hand the same is not true for “Baihaqi”<sup>2</sup> and “Saadi”<sup>3</sup>. When you read *Golistan*<sup>4</sup>, its significance is very clear. It may be enjoyed literally yet the meanings are old. In the case of “Hafez” whose language is mysterious, each word conveys new meaning and insight depending upon one’s inclination and understanding.

So, religions which are relevant to different generations should use symbolic language — entailing mysterious words hidden behind codes that appear to have numerous meanings. Nevertheless, the facts and true meanings are discovered by the reader according to his comprehension.

Fifteen centuries after the story of the creation of Adam, with today’s extensive progress in knowledge and science, it is

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<sup>1</sup>Hafez: a famous Persian poet and expert in the Arabic and Persian languages who memorized the entire Quran.

<sup>2</sup>Baihaqi: Persian poet.

<sup>3</sup>Saadi: Persian poet.

<sup>4</sup>Golistan: Book by Saadi



worthwhile to study the language of man's creation. What does Islam say about it?

God tells the angels that He wants to create His representative on earth.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً

**Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth.**

**Quran II; 30**

(Please take note of the high reverence for man in Islam. Even European and post-scientific revolution humanism were unable to delegate such high quality and value for man.) God who from an Islamic point of view is the Greatest, the Most Exalted, the Creator, the Superior and the Ruler of all — in talking to the angels, presents man as His vicegerent on earth. At that moment, man's mission began — the mission to be his representative!

The angels responded by asking — **"Do you want to create somebody on earth to commit murder and crime and to be spiteful and revengeful?"**

**Quran II; 30**

قَالُوْا اَجْعَلْ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ

(It seems that before Adam there were people who committed crimes, sin and corruption. The angels were reminding God that if He created a new "man", he would do the same.) God responds by saying — **"I know something that you are unaware of."**

**Quran II; 30**

قَالَ اِنِّىْ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ

God decided to create man; at that point one may view the symbols under which the deep aspects of human ecology are hidden.

In His creation, God should have chosen the purest and most valuable matter on earth but does the opposite. He chose the lowest,

that is, “mud”! There are three Quranic references which refer to the source of man’s creation. They are as “clay”<sup>1</sup> (Salsal-e-Kalfakh-Khar) (صَلْصَلٌ كَالْبَخَّارِ), from “black mud or odorous earth” (Hamman-Masnoon) (جَمًّا مَسْنُونًا) and lastly from “simple earth”. Then, God breathed His spirit into it and man’s creation was completed.

In contemporary language the best description and symbol for putrefaction and meanness is “mud”. In the same terms, God is the most righteous and great while the purest part of each being is his spirit. So, Adam, God’s representative, is created from the greatest thing man can imagine. Consequently, man is a dualistic creature whereas other creatures have only one dimension. At one pole, he follows meanness; sunk in mud, he will stop and precipitate like the sedentary layer left behind from the flood-water (clay) at the river bank which is motionless, waveless, stagnated and dead. This is the part of man that wishes to be indifferent. But the other dimension of man wants to grow, ascend and reach the highest possible level, that is, the Spirit of God and God himself!

Man’s nobility and importance is in his will, the power which can determine his direction — downwards to sink in mud or upwards to approach Almighty God. In choosing his fate, a continuous struggle exists between these two poles.

**God taught Adam “The Names”. And He taught Adam the nature of all things . . .**

**Quran II; 31**

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا

but what that meant was not very explicit. Everyone tried to interpret it but there is no doubt “Name” refers to education. The angels then complained and said, “We are created from ‘smoke-free fire’ (سَاحٍ مِنَ النَّارِ) while man is created from mud. Why are you endowing him with a higher quality?”

**Quran II; 30**

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<sup>1</sup>clay: the dried sedimentary layer found at the bank of a river after a flood.

God replied, "I know something you do not know."

"You must prostrate before man;" **وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ**  
all angels followed God's command except Ibliss.

**Not so Ibliss; he refused and was haughty.**

**He was of those who reject faith. (Quran II, 34)**

فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ ۖ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ۝

The above command depicts "Humanism". See the glory and value accorded to man. Despite their superiority in origin (angels created from light while man from mud) and race, all the angels had to humiliate themselves before man!

Since the angels objected to God's commands, he examined their knowledge by asking them the "names". They failed to reply but Adam was able to answer. By knowing the "names" Adam asserted his personality and superiority over the angels who were superior in race and origin. This defined man's personality in Islam; he knows things the angels don't know. Although the superiority of Angels and Satan is obvious, man is more respected. One may conclude that man's superiority and nobility does not depend on his race or origin but on his knowledge!

### Creation

It is contended that Eve was created from Adam's rib. However, "rib" is a poor translation since in Hebrew and Arabis the real meaning is "nature". Therefore, Eve (wo:man) is created from man's nature NOT his rib.

Nietzsche<sup>1</sup> (1844-1900 A.D.) says, "man and woman were initially from two different creatures; then they became similar, and through the years they got together." In other words, they were originally from two different races. Most scientists and philosophers who maintain man and woman have a common origin always consider man to be superior to woman. On the other hand, the Quran says, "**We have created Eve from Adam's 'nature'**" which signifies the fact that they have the same origin!

<sup>1</sup>Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844-1900): German philosopher

**O Mankind! We created You from a single (pair) of a male and female.**

**Quran XLIX; 13** يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ

Strangely enough, when God called upon all the creatures (all nature's phenomena from inanimates, plants, etc.) and said, "I have something to present to all of you — the earth, sky, mountains, seas and animals — to hold as a trust." (Quran XXXIII; 72) everyone but man refused to accept his offer. So, it became evident that man was endowed with a higher quality. He accepted the role of being God's trustee whereby he would care for what the Almighty presented to the whole world. This meant that man is not only God's representative but also His trustee. What is the trust? There are various explanations. Moulavi<sup>1</sup> says it is man's "will-power" and "authority" which seems to be a correct interpretation.

In comparison to other creatures, man's distinctive quality is his will-power. He is the only one who can act against his instinctive demands and nature; no other plant or animal can do so. It is only man who can resist his wishes and physiological needs, who can pursue the good or bad way, who can follow or disobey his wisdom and who can descend into mud or ascend toward God!

God, the Almighty, the Owner of Absolute Will who can do as He wishes, has given this ability to man. The source being God's spirit, man may act in a similar BUT unequal way. What is the privilege? Man may exercise authority and will-power. He is free to do good or evil, obey or rebel. Therefore, the following is what one may understand from the nature and philosophy of creation:

1. All men are not equal but they are brothers. There is a difference between "equality" and "brotherhood". Equality is only a civil or legal term but brotherhood acknowledges the co-nature of all men. All races are from the same source.

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<sup>1</sup>Molavi: A Muslim poet and philosopher of Persia

2. Equality of man and woman means that all are from the same source and created at the same time by the same God. In all aspects, they have the same inheritance. They are from one race and as brothers and sisters who have the same parents.
3. Due to his knowledge and scientific quality mankind has superiority over the angels. Because man learned the "name" all the angels had to prostrate to him.
4. Man is a mixed phenomenon, made of mud and the Spirit of God. He has the freedom to choose either pole. Having will-power makes him free but responsible. So, from an Islamic point of view, man is the only creature responsible for his fate. He is to carry the mission of God in this world and be his trustee on earth. He knows the "names" (scientific facts). Therefore, to learn the names from God is to realize and comprehend the existing scientific facts.

Since man is able to learn the facts, it is his responsibility to do so. This in turn makes him responsible for his fate and future — as an individual and member of society. **"The fate of the old civilization is what they themselves gained; your fate depends on what you gain."** (Quran II; 141)

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلكُمْ مَّا كَسَبْتُمْ

History is facing a great tragedy by not presenting man in a dualistic fashion. In contrast to other religions where God and Satan both exist and are constantly struggling in the individual's soul, according to Islam, there is only one power which belongs to Almighty God. This is within man's soul where Satan is fighting with Allah and man. In Islam, Satan is confronted with man (the half part which comes from God) not God. Because of the dual aspect of man, he searches for "mud" and God — needing both. In order to establish the base of his life, the type of faith and ideology he chooses must be that kind which will satisfy both demands ( رَسَالًا وَآخِرَةً ).

Unfortunately, history does not agree with the above thesis. It maintains that societies followed worldly matters — mainly concerned with beauties and enjoyments. The ways of the Chinese

portrayed such a life-style. Then Laotse<sup>1</sup> came and advocated an ascetic faith in which the mutual needs of man were emphasized. Many were influenced and became monks or sufis. And then, Confucious philosophy led the people toward materialism again.

In India, the land of "Rajehs" and religion of Mahavira, Vedai and Buddha — righteousness and asceticism prevailed. Sufis and monks increased in number. For that reason, India is considered the land of sufis (those who suffer by lying on beds of nails or live on a date for forty days; they reject life).

In Europe, by committing crimes and murders the Romans attempted to dominate over the natural resources in Europe and Asia. They increased their wealth, enjoyed themselves, lived luxuriously and played Gladiators. But then Jesus came and led the society toward love, kindness and asceticism at its extreme. Rome went from secularism to asceticism. This set the atmosphere for the Middle Ages when the land of fighting, human slavery and military power changed to a land of monasticism. Later, due to corruption, the scientific revolution occurred and led Europe toward materialism and secularism again. Today one can note how materialistic, corrupted, and selfish western civilization is. As professor "Shandel"<sup>2</sup> says, "The world today is spending too much time on producing housewares. This is the stupidity of man's philosophy today — the meaning of aimless technology. Humanity is so deviated and devoted to materialism that another Jesus is needed to come."

As understood by the Islamic philosophy of man, this dualistic creature should have a religion that is in a dual fashion. Constantly and in both contradictory ways, it uses its forces on human society and human spirit to guarantee a continuous balance. This is Islam! Why? Because to know a religion one should know its God, its book, its prophet and the best people trained by that faith:

1. God, in Islam, has two faces. One as Jehove (God of the Jews) who is worldly, rough, a politician, despotic and punishes

<sup>1</sup>Laotse (604 ? - 531 B.C.): Chinese philosopher

<sup>2</sup>Shandel: A great contemporary sociologist

severely. The other face is as the God of Jesus who is kind, compassionate and Merciful. Aren't all these characteristics attributed to Almighty God in the Quran?

وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ○ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ○ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

2. The Book — The Quran — like the Old Testament talks about social, political and military matters. It even discusses capturing and freeing prisoners, improving one's life, opposing the enemy and resisting evil. Like the Bible, The Quran invites you to self-purification, sanctification, devoutness and righteousness.
3. The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was a man with two faces. He was always in the battlefield waging a military and political war against the enemies and corrupt in order to establish a new society and civilization. He was also a leader with a special goal, a man of prayer who was devoted and righteous.
4. The trainees of the Islamic School — Ali, Abuzar and Salman — were the politicians, soldiers and strugglers for a better life. They participated in the battle front, the education process and scientific discussions. They were also the men of righteousness, chastity and the great eastern gnostics. For example, Abuzar fought against poverty at the time of Othman (the wealthy Caliph). He was also learned and righteous. The amount of research he did in the way of knowing and believing in God is a good example and key to understanding The Quran. All the Prophet's companions (Sahaba) were men of the sword, struggled for a better and pure society, established justice and were great thinkers who also had great feelings.

As a conclusion, it may be stated that in Islam, man is not weak and disabled before God since he is His representative, His friend and His trustee on this earth. Man has the ability to know. All the angels had to prostrate to him. A dualistic human with such a great responsibility needs a religion to lead him neither toward absolute asceticism nor toward absolute materialism, but toward a state of balance. He needs a dualistic religion to fulfill the great responsibility he accepted; that is Islam!!!







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33. The Role of History in Understanding Religion
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43. One Month Along With the Great Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)
44. Faith and Science
45. The Social Rights of Women
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48. A Letter to My Father
49. The Quran and the Computer
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56. The Philosophy of History in the Faith of Ibrahim
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58. The Desert
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63. The Causes of the Decline of Religions
64. The Pains of Living
65. Science, A New Scholastic

66. The Philosophy of Worshipping
67. Imam Ali, The Founder of Unity
68. Ali is Lonely
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